

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 13, 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
2125 Rayburn HOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Barton:

As the Energy and Commerce Committee considers actions to respond to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, we ask that you include H.R. 896, the Calling for 2-1-1 Act, in any relief package considered by our Committee.

In 2000, the FCC designated 2-1-1 as the free, three-digit telephone number for community, volunteer, health and human services information and referral. Whether the caller needs help or wants to volunteer help, 2-1-1, where it is available, links the caller to a live, trained specialist who provides referrals that best match the needs of the caller.

Only 47% of the nation has access to 2-1-1, but where it is in service, it is already making a difference. It is acting in response to Katrina:

- The governor of Louisiana has designated 2-1-1 as the number to call to get help or give help. In many areas where 9-1-1 is not currently operational, 2-1-1 is handling emergency calls as well. 2-1-1 is THE go-to number for relief and resettlement of evacuees.
- Governor Rell of Connecticut has also designated 2-1-1 as the number to call for evacuee assistance.
- Texas 2-1-1 has received a dramatic increase in call volume, experiencing a jump from 2,000 calls to 18,000 calls per day, a 900% increase.
- The call center in the city of Monroe, Louisiana, has grown from 6 to 60 phones.
- The Red Cross and FEMA are issuing pamphlets with 2-1-1 as the number to call in all of their shelters in areas where 2-1-1 is available. Word has spread, and folks are calling 2-1-1 everywhere, *even where the service is not operational*.
- Tennessee has seen call volume jump by as much as 1,100%.
- The United Way of America is working with BellSouth to quickly bring 2-1-1 to Mississippi, which currently has no 2-1-1 service. Contingency plans may allow for the United Way's call center in Raleigh, NC handle Mississippi's calls until a more

permanent call center can be established in Jackson, MS. Currently, Arkansas does not have 2-1-1 service.

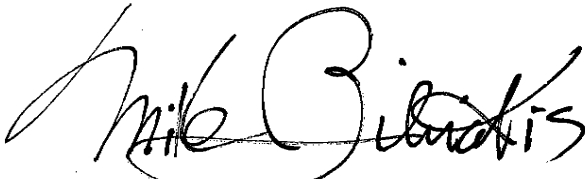
- Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma, Georgia, and the Carolinas are also experiencing large increases in call volume (in the areas of the state that have 2-1-1 service) as a result of the storm and their absorption of evacuees.

Additionally, a recent cost-benefit analysis conducted by the University of Texas found that a nationwide 2-1-1 system would save the country \$1.1 billion over ten years. 2-1-1 builds efficiencies into human service delivery, both in terms of time and money.

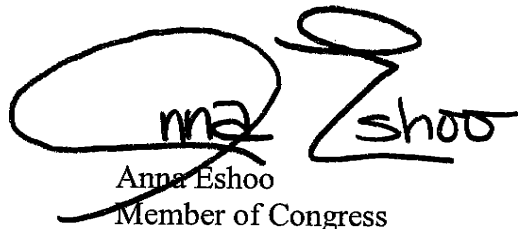
In addition to addressing everyday needs, the vital role 2-1-1 can play in times of crises cannot be overstated. From its response to the attacks of 9/11, to preparation for and response to the 2004 hurricanes in Florida, to 2-1-1's response in the devastated areas of Katrina and to her evacuees who have been scattered across the United States, 2-1-1 has proven itself as a vital crisis preparedness and response tool. We urge you to consider 2-1-1 as an essential element to any Hurricane Katrina relief package considered by our Committee.

Thank you for your attention to this very important request.

Sincerely yours,



Michael Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress